CLAIMS:

1. A method of automatically determining a reading of a Japanese word; the method including:

receiving an input string of at least one character representing the Japanese word;

choosing for each character of the Japanese word a corresponding reading, by:

- for each character determining whether the character is a kanji, hiragana, or katakana character;
- for a hiragana or katakana character choosing the only one reading associated with the character; and
- for a kanji character determining whether or not the immediately preceding character and/or the immediately succeeding character is also a kanji character; and choosing for the kanji character an on-reading associated with the kanji character if the immediately preceding character and/or the immediately succeeding character in the word is also a kanji character, and choosing a kun-reading associated with the kanji character otherwise;

concatenating the corresponding readings of each character of the Japanese word; and

outputting the concatenated reading.

2. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein for a kanji character that in the word is not immediately preceded or succeeded by a kanji character, the method includes choosing a most frequent one of a plurality of kun-readings associated with the kanji character.

3. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein for a kanji character that in the word is immediately preceded or succeeded by at least one kanji character, the method includes choosing a most frequent one of a plurality of on-readings associated with the kanji character.

4. A method as claimed in claim 3, wherein the step of choosing a most frequent one of a plurality of on-readings associated with the kanji character includes selecting a group of a plurality of sequential kanji characters in the word, including the kanji character being converted, and choosing a most frequent one of a plurality of on-readings associated with the group of kanji characters.

5. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein each hiragana character is associated with one reading; and the method includes for a hiragana character of the word choosing the associated reading.

6. A method as claimed in claim 5, wherein each katakana character is associated with a corresponding hiragana character; and the method includes for a hiragana character of the word choosing the reading associated with the hiragana character corresponding to the katakana character.

7. A computer program product operative to cause a processor to perform the method as claimed in claim 1.

8. A system for automatically determining a reading of a Japanese word includes:

an input for receiving an input string of at least one character representing the Japanese word;

a memory for storing:

for hiragana characters a respective associated reading;

for katakana characters a respective associated reading; and

for a kanji character a respective associated on-reading and a respective associated kun-reading;

a processor for determining for each character of the Japanese word a corresponding reading, by:

- for each character determining whether the character is a kanji, hiragana, or katakana character;
- for a hiragana or katakana character choosing the stored reading associated with the character; and
- for a kanji character determining whether or not the immediately preceding character and/or the immediately succeeding character is also a kanji character; and choosing for the kanji character the on-reading associated with the kanji character if the immediately preceding character and/or the immediately succeeding character in the word is also a kanji character, and choosing the kun-reading associated with the kanji character otherwise; and

for concatenating the corresponding readings of each character of the Japanese word; and

an output for outputting the concatenated reading.